

Political Banditry in the French Communist Party

The Party is Conducting Factional Struggles Without Principles or Platform

The Communist movement in France today finds itself in an extremely difficult position. The tremendous sweep of enthusiasm for the Communist International in the early years following upon the Russian revolution, reaching a high point when the Left wing won a majority at the Tours congress of the French Socialist Party, has been considerably arrested in recent years. Here, as everywhere else, the ravages of Stalinism have left their painful scars—more correctly, open wounds—on the body of the movement. A few instances, tersely stated, will prove adequate.

A brief four years ago, the C. G. T. U., the trade union center under the control of the party, had at least as many members as the reformist unions—some 400,000 in each. Today, the C. G. T. U. finds itself in the grip of a profound crisis, having lost almost half of its members, while the C. G. T. has about 700,000 in its ranks. The party has lost at least a similar proportion of its membership. The Y. C. L. reveals an even worse state of affairs. The central organ of the party, *l'Humanité*, reports an uninterrupted decline in circulation. Or, better yet, let us quote directly from an unpublished resolution adopted at the enlarged District Committee meeting of the Paris region of the party:

Revelations of the Party Conference of Paris

"(a) The membership of the party is stagnant. The applications made hardly suffice to compensate the losses suffered in certain centers and the fluctuations which continue to be very substantial.

"(b) The Unitary trade unions have lost, in 1930, an important number of adherents. In spite of the seriousness of such a fact, the loss of members has not been arrested in the first semester of 1931.

"(c) The sale of *l'Humanité* has been in constant regression for a long period.

"(d) This weakening of our organization indicates a loss of influence which manifests itself in the assemblages (less attendance at meetings and demonstrations) and in the course of certain elections where, side by side with some progress, we have observed retreats.

"(e) While the Socialist Federation makes an effort to win the workers' strata, while it fights stubbornly for our troops, we record no work to win over the socialist and C. G. T. workers.

"(f) One of the most disturbing and most serious facts is that the offensive against wages in the metal industry developed this year without our having prepared and organized the resistance.

"(g) Our organizational positions in the shops are becoming constantly weaker. One might say almost non-existent.

"(h) The demonstrations of February 25, of May 1, of August 1, of September 6, brought out only a tiny number of workers.

"(i) The district revealed an almost complete passivity in the course of important national and international events: Spain, Roubaix, Germany, trip to Paris of General Bono, voyage of Reynaud to Indo-China, etc.

"(j) The Youth organization is stagnant and has found no support in the party.

"(k) In the various mass organizations (International Red Aid, Workers International Relief, Friends of the Soviet Union, Tenants, etc.) there is a stagnation or a retrogression of membership."

Stated in moderated terms, the resolution of the Paris district indicates the present state of affairs in the ranks of official Communism in France, based upon conditions obtaining in the most important and strongest sector of the party—Paris. In the provinces, the tableau is considerably more depressing.

Preparations For Another "Decisive Turn"

The "decisive turn" of the middle of last year, even if one is to take only the admissions made officially by the Stalin-

ists, manifestly resulted in no amelioration of the falling health of the party. If anything, it has gone from bad to worse. And at the present moment, the party is threatened with heavy blows directed at the most important domain of Communist influence upon the working class: the trade unions. The details of this phase of the problem must be left for a more extensive account. It is enough to state here that the reformists of the C. G. T. have taken the offensive against the C. G. T. U. and the party all along the line, and already with considerable success. In the ranks of the C. G. T. U. itself, a substantial Right wing current has forged to the front and is conducting the work of reformism within the revolutionary ranks—on the question of trade union unity—which the helpless and hopeless Stalinist leaders of the C. G. T. U., whose national congress is assembled in Paris as these lines are written, show themselves to be incapable of countering. When one adds to this the fact that the discontentment of the party membership manifests itself not only by voting against the bureaucrats with their feet, but also by gutterings and even by open protest, those in the slightest initiated into the methods of operation of Stalinism will immediately realize that the stage is all set for a "new turn", just as "decisive" as those which preceded it.

Another Scapgoat Is Discovered

But no "turn" is complete on the Stalinist stage without a villain, that is, without the revelation of a scapegoat, or a number, or group of scapegoats, to whom is attributed all the evil of yesterday, all the maladies of the party, and all the responsibility for what has happened since the last "turn" and frequently further back. This time, however, the "discovery of those responsible" has laid bare a case of political banditry which, at least so far as the writer knows, is unique in the records of the international Communist movement.

In the columns of *l'Humanité*, one reads now that most if not all of the tribulations of the party are to be traced to what is currently known as "the group", that is, a clique of leaders of the party and the Youth. Just what is "the group"? One of its leading members, Billoux, gives the following information about it (all quotations are translated directly from *l'Humanité* itself): "Actually constituted since 1923 in the struggle against the opportunist policy of the party leaderships of those days, this group, as leader of the Communist Youth, helped greatly in the purging of the party and in its formation. The mistake of the comrades belonging to this group is only the greater because of it.

"In the meetings of the regions and of the district committees, many comrades have asked for clarification on the Central Committee resolution where it says that we had constituted a group without a political basis. It is a fact that we had no special political platform. But we considered ourselves as the only ones capable of applying the correct political line." (11-2-31.)

Confirming the confessions of Billoux, the representative of the Political Bureau at the Paris district committee meeting mentioned above, Frachon declared that "the group constituted in the Political Bureau has existed for seven to eight years, that it had groups in the regions, in the districts, in the Paris district, in the Confederal Bureau [of the C. G. T. U]."

Explaining Away the "Excesses" of Stalinism

The group disclosed, the new group

(for what else has replaced the old one in the leadership of the party?) proceeds systematically to demonstrate to the membership what scoundrels their predecessors were and what chemically pure Leninists the party is now endowed with in the person of the new leadership: Thorez, Frachon and Co. At the same time, the "excesses" of last year's Stalinism are conveniently ascribed to the poor scapegoats. For example: Thorez writes indignantly about "the group" in these terms:

"A comrade of the group condemned by the Central Committee thought that the Communist International was backsliding to the Right and revising the previous theses on social-fascism. And what was the argument, or rather the pretext, invoked? Simply that we did not repeat in every line of the theses the term social-fascist. The group was impregnated with the sectarian, Leftist spirit, the comrade considered as a step towards opportunism the effort, recommended by the International, with a view towards convincing the socialist workers otherwise than with epithets [Aha!]... And perhaps we shall still have to establish to what extent the sectarian practices of the group contributed to disorienting the party, to disarming it before the bourgeois and social democratic enemy, to what extent, finally, the group facilitated the frankly opportunist mistakes which we must establish at the moment when the party is once more taking the first steps in the tactic of the united front." (11-3-31.)

Bad? The Artful Dodger himself could do no better! And not only on the question of "social-fascism". It appears that all the blunders and crimes, in the theoretical as well as in the practical domain, committed in the trade union question should legitimately be ascribed to "the group". The apostle Thorez vouchsafes us this revelation also: "By forgetting or not knowing these elementary truths, the group did considerable damage to the work of redemption decided upon by the party since July 1930, particularly in the relations between the party and the trade unions." (10-31-31.)

The Paris resolution referred to above, to explain the situation which it speaks about in such detail, announces that "the fact that one of the principal leaders of the district, comrade Celor, belonged to the group constituted in the leadership of the party, contributed greatly to the development of such a state of affairs". And it is in this resolution that we learn for the first time who it was that constituted "the group": "... the enlarged District Committee approves the condemnation of the grave mistakes committed by Barbe, Celor, Raymond, Lozeray, Billoux, Coutheillas, Galopin and condemns the group work carried on by Celor in the Paris district."

Who Are "The Group"?

The members of "the group" are no small fry. They were the leaders of the party and nothing less. Barbe was a member of the Political Bureau and of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, where he represented the French party. Celor held the same two positions. Raymond was on the Paris District Committee. Lozeray was on the Central Committee of the party and a member of the Secretariat. Billoux was secretary of the Young Communist League and member of the Executive of the Young Communist International. Coutheillas was on the secretariat of the Y. C. L. Galopin was on the Confederal Bureau of the C. G. T. U. Their influence extended far beyond the limits of seven clansmen. The report of the Paris meeting declares that Lar-

iber, the secretary of the Paris district, "denies having known of the existence of the group but acknowledges having worked under its influence." No less a Stalinist statesman than Pierre Semard, secretary of the party until a short time ago, made the same admission in a "self-critical" confession in *l'Humanité*.

The question immediately arises: How was this group which, if we are to believe Thorez, has neither a definite political platform nor any principles, and which always voted approval of the decisions of the International—how was this group able to exist for seven or eight years as a closed and unknown faction, carrying on its machinations and maneuvers throughout the party, the youth and the trade unions with the single aim of gaining control of the party apparatus? How was it able, from an obscure group of Communist Youth, to gain such decisive control of the party, to represent it in the highest instances of the Communist International—the Executive Committee?

There have been numerous instances in the history of the Communist International—in its best days and in its worst—of factional and group struggles for party leadership. But these were carried on in the open, their existence was known, they had distinct platforms, with very tangible points at issue. Around them took place open, and sometimes very violent, discussions. After a certain period, one standpoint or the other triumphed and the course of the party was clearly identifiable with the people who directed it. Such internal disputes constitute the very life of an active, lusty revolutionary political movement which is closely connected with the course of events and their constant permutations.

Sordid Practices Revealed

But what we have here is an entirely and a radically different matter. The "group" was constituted without any political platform. Its existence was never communicated to anyone other than its own chiefs. It never strove to gain places and posts in the party leadership in the name of a political line different from that pursued by the incumbent leadership. All its actions bore a purely conspirative character. Struggle for political control without political principle, without a special platform, by exclusively conspirative methods, is known by the short and ugly term: **political banditry**.

A couple of instances will serve as additional support for this designation. What *l'Humanité* does not tell the party members is an incident like the following: When Thorez was serving a term in prison at Nancy in 1930 for "violating the press law", Barbe, who was in the party secretariat at the time, made a whole series of demagogic arguments against paying the fine which would have released Thorez for party work: "Party leaders should not be better treated than the ordinary revolutionary worker". It was only after an indignant intervention of a Comintern delegation that the secretariat was obliged to pay the fine. Barbe's reluctance to pay Thorez at large is now easily comprehensible in the light of the "revelations"—Thorez and Barbe were at sword's points in the party and the bourgeoisie had simply done Barbe a decent turn by incarcerating Thorez! Only, it must be borne in mind that if such conduct cannot be called Communist, it can surely be compared to the conduct of a gangster towards his rival.

The writer recalls further an incident

at the 1925 Plenum of the Young Communist International. In the Political Commission, Doriot, at that time a conscious or unconscious agent of "the group", launched a furious and thoroughly nauseating attack upon the then representative in Moscow of the French Youth League, Mouton. The violence and the gross language in which the attack was made were incomprehensible at the time, as was the categorical demand that Mouton be sent back to France. Now we learn the reason for the demand, which was in no way at all motivated by Doriot in his two speeches. It appeared that at that time Mouton was a political friend of Treint, the leader of the French party in 1925. "The group" was busy cutting Treint to pieces and Mouton was only one of many who had to be got rid of—and were.

Who Are the Fighters Against the Left Opposition?

Still another characterization of "the group" and its members cannot be omitted. As should be expected, all of them were and are still to be found in the very forefront of the struggle against "Trotskysm". At the very moment when Barbe and his pals were carrying on their conspirative faction work, Barbe proclaimed at the 1928 congress of the French party, in speaking about the expulsion of the "Trotskyists" from the party: "It is to insult the memory and all of the teachings of Lenin even to dare to refer to the actions of Lenin in order to render legitimate the factional work of the Opposition which only leads to the demoralization of the working class, to deflecting it from the revolutionary path." (21-28.) It does not require penetrating imagination to picture to oneself the cynical laughter that must have shaken Barbe internally while delivering himself of this righteous assault upon the "factionalists" of the Opposition.

And now, where was the party all these seven-eight years while the bandits were secretly at work? Where was the membership, with its control over party policies and party leadership? The only answer is: it was there, but it had nothing to say in the matter. The membership became a mere shadow on the wall, going through certain formal motions which were never registered in actuality. Everything was decided outside of the ranks of the party itself, in the secret meeting places of a self-perpetuating clique without principles or a feeling of responsibility. In the face of the recent revelations, what do all the discussions in the French party signify? What value have all the party conferences and congresses, which were supposed to decide the questions of party policy and to select the leadership of the party? In this whole sordid history, where can one find the mere trace of party democracy? Nowhere, for in France as everywhere else in the Stalinist International, party democracy has long ago been ruthlessly exterminated; only the most shadowy remnants of it remain. And that is in the very nature of Stalinism: a false policy, a policy of blunders and uninterrupted defeats can be imposed upon the worker-Communists only by a bureaucratic machine which crushes the party to pieces as it rolls along. A more salient and unanswerable example of this process than that presented by "the group" cannot be given in the recent history of Stalinism. To find a comparison one must depart from the domain of the labor movement and search in the sewers of bourgeois politics: the seven years' history of "the group" is comparable only to the conduct and methods of Tammany Hall. Its success would undoubtedly excite the admiration and

perhaps the envy of John Curry, McCooey and Boss Vare of Philadelphia.

But, it will be said, the "new" party leadership nevertheless did uncover them and pillory them in public. Like most half-truths this is worse than a falsehood. The fact of the matter is that "the group" was not uncovered in the interests of Communist purity and probity of conduct. The fact of the matter is, further, that Thorez and Co. knew of the existence of "the group" many months ago, at least, and this by their own admission. In the very first article mentioning even the existence of "the group" (but taking care even then to omit the names), Thorez wrote at the end of October:

"In July, the C. C. established, in spite of its May resolution, not only the development of the group spirit but also the existence of a closed group whose members submitted to the discipline of the group, met outside of the regular organisms of the party in order to put their heads together and to determine their common attitude in all the problems of party policy." (10-28-31.)

The fact of the matter is, still further, that "the group" was known even before July. In the middle of 1930, at the moment of the "decisive turn" which followed after the heights of the "third period" had been attained, the Political Bureau was reorganized precisely in order to destroy the domination of Barbe and Co. It was reconstituted with Thorez, Monmousseau, Semard, Frachon, Cachin, Doriot and Barbe, leaving only the last-named as a representative of "the group". Why then are they exposed only now, at this late date? For the reason we mentioned at the very outset. The condition of the party has reached so serious a state and aroused so much discontentment in the party that another "new turn" has been decided upon. A Stalinist turn has as its *sine qua non*, its absolutely inescapable pre-requisite, a group of scapegoats. In France, the scapegoat is "the group". It offers itself willingly, as the public self-inflicted wounds of its adherents demonstrate. As a reward for this final phase of the conspiracy against the party, they are let off with a "punishment" which is nothing less than a direct incitation to a repetition of such work. Lozeray, for example, after a public avowal of the fact that he had acted for some eight years as a common bourgeois politician, as a bandit instead of a Communist, is "punished" by being made full-time treasurer of the Workers' Sport Federation.

What Needs To Be Done

But Thorez, Frachon and Co., to whom cynicism and Stalinist corruption are not alien qualities, are not interested in that. All they require is a scapegoat for themselves. The party membership is restless? Then throw it a bone! That is why the campaign is being conducted so furiously in the columns of *l'Humanité* against "the group". That is why the attention of all the party meetings is being turned in that direction. That is why it is already common knowledge that, in face of the tremendous problems facing Communism in France, the announced party congress will be held shortly entirely under the sign of "the struggle against the group". That is how the Stalinists hope to distract the attention of the party from their own enormities, from their own incapacity, from their own blunders in permanence.

Let us hope that the Left Opposition in France, despite the fewness of its numbers, will be able to arouse at least a small but resolute section of the party vanguard which will start delivering some imperatively needed blows, not only at political banditry but at the whole rotten foundation of Stalinism which underlies it.

—MAX SHACHTMAN.

Paris, November 11, 1931.

The Work of the Greek Opposition

The Archio-Marxists Lead the Workers in the Class Struggle

On behalf of the International Secretariat I visited the Greek comrades, with whom I stayed four days. I became convinced that the Left Opposition in Greece has become a leading revolutionary force in the young working class movement there. I must emphasize the fact that the whole revolutionary movement, both Party and Opposition, is being frightfully terrorized, that anti-Communist laws and special courts are prevalent, that severe penalties (lately five and six years of prison) are being imposed for mere membership in a Communist group, and finally, that the Party and the Opposition work under strictly illegal conditions.

In spite of all this, the Opposition is strong in numbers; counting all Greece, it has today about 1,400 members. Its strongest centers are Athens, Piraeus, and Saloniki, which are among the most important centers of the labor movement in Greece. We must however remember that these 1,400 members without exception are firmly established in all mass organizations.

All work is strictly divided among the members, the activity of each is under exacting supervision, as all comrades must give an accurate report twice a month on their activity, and a true collective cooperation rules in the organization. I had the opportunity of talking to a group of comrades from Saloniki, who were in Athens for a conference. They were almost without exception workers. They are among the best-trained cadres in the labor movement, very active in daily work, fully penetrated with the conviction of the correct-

ness of the ideas of the Left Opposition, and they carry on an untiring fight for clarification among the workers.

The Opposition in Greece, called the "Archio-Marxists", far outnumber the Party, not only in membership, but also in the number of readers of their press, not to speak of its quality. Even if the Party received more votes than the Left Opposition in the past, it must be remembered that the Party carries the authority of the U. S. S. R. and of the C. I. on its banner. In all activities outside the elections, as an organized force, it is clearly proven that not the Party, but the Opposition, enjoys the confidence of the Greek working class. Let us let the facts speak for themselves.

The Press

Our comrades began with a magazine which appeared twice a month. Now it appears twice a week with an issue of 6 to 7,000 copies. Our comrades are now issuing, or causing to issue under their influence, the following papers: 1. A theoretical magazine, appearing monthly, with an issue of 4,000 copies.

2. The trade unions which are under our influence issue a number of papers which are edited completely along the lines of the Left Opposition. To name only the most important, (a) a bakers' workers' monthly, (b) a shoemakers' monthly, (c) a monthly paper for war invalids, "The Voice of the Sacrificed", (d) a monthly paper for students. Each of these has a circulation of 6 to 7,000 and is distributed throughout the entire country. All this work is controlled and directed by the strictly-organized

fractions of the Left Opposition in the Left trade unions.

3. The Union of Employees of Banks and Corporations issue a monthly publication. This union has 1,200 members and fully approves the political lines of the Left Opposition. All the comrades who issue this magazine are among the old Party comrades.

Next week they will also begin the publication of a new monthly in Jewish, **The Proletariat**, in Saloniki.

Political Activities

These at first consisted of the offer to the Party of a united front in the struggle against terror and reaction. The Party made no answer. They realized it in spite of the refusal. It took place at the well-known trial of the two soldiers, Party members, who were condemned to death. A demonstration was organized in front of Athens University, at which the majority consisted of oppositionist comrades; a severe collision with the police took place, some of the comrades were wounded and some arrested, but one comrade was able to deliver a speech.

Then followed demonstrations in the court-room. In the course of the trial of the two soldiers one of the Oppositionist comrades were sentenced to four years in jail, only for shouting out to the judges and the audience, "The workers produce and have to starve, while you gentlemen do nothing and live on the fat of the land!" For this insult to the judges our comrade was sentenced to four years in jail. This action however showed good results for the future development of the united front with

the Party. The membership began to see that the Archio-Marxists are no "Archio-fascists", but together with the Party are struggling against the hated system.

Unemployment

Since February 1930 the work of organizing the unemployed has been begun, accompanied by frequent collisions with the police. In Athens, Piraeus, there is a committee of 50 unemployed, in Saloniki of 30 members, who direct these organizations. Lately general mass meetings have been organized. In Athens there were 1,000 participants, in Piraeus 1,500 and in Saloniki about 2,000. An unemployment meeting in Saloniki was charged by cavalry, and some were wounded. As a result of our activity so far, the unemployed already receive free soup. Our Opposition was the first to take up the struggle for the demands of the unemployed, only afterwards did the Party take it up. One thing should be pointed out—the class enemy, and its savage armed forces, makes no distinction between the Opposition and the Party.

The demonstrations of war orphans should also be mentioned here. We carried through a demonstration in front of the political office of Venizelos, in which some 1,000 took part. In an encounter with the police a great many were wounded.

Elections

At the elections the Party received many more votes than our Opposition, but this is explained on two grounds: 1. The members and sympathizers of the Opposition in Saloniki are partly grouped around young worker elements, who have not yet reached the legal voting age. 2. Although the Party is constantly losing influence and now has little influence among organized trade union

workers, and although these same workers follow our Opposition in the daily struggle and in all extra-parliamentary activity, still at the elections they continue to regard the Party as the only representative of the U. S. S. R. and of the C. I. At the later elections our comrades understood this mistake, formed a united front with the Party and called on all workers to vote for the Party. This action was greeted with enthusiasm by the Party comrades and the pressure became so strong that recently the Party leadership was compelled to take the Opposition back into the Red Relief. In all the prisons, too, the Opposition have been received into the collective organizations of the prisoners. This was accomplished only by a correct united front tactic toward the party.

Trade Unions

The work of the Opposition in the trade unions is concentrated under the slogan, "For Trade Union Unity—Against the Splitters!" Everywhere in the workers' centers, among the workers of the Party and those who are under reformist influence, this slogan finds ready acceptance. For instance, as a result of the untiring work of the Opposition, reunion has been achieved in the bakery and shoe trade between our unions and the reformists. Now, after this reunion, the leadership is in the hands of the Opposition. The same results were achieved with the food industry workers. We forced the Stalinists to accept the reunion of both organizations and to take the bakers' union into the general federation of food industry workers. The Opposition hopes to win over the whole federation in a short time. The same tactics are being applied in the leather and building construction trades. The unions which are led by the Opposition are the most active and the best organized.

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Organization

The participation of the Opposition in the general class struggles in Greece forced a small number of its adherents to leave its ranks. These are the so-called "Fractionists", who reunited with elements which had already previously been expelled from the Opposition. At first this took on a purely personal character, through mudslinging and slander of various comrades. Later, however, they took the viewpoint that the Opposition must give up all political as well as trade union struggles, and thus idealized the beginning stage of the Opposition, which had been based on work in narrow circles.

Under this slogan they acquired a group of elements who have no understanding of mass struggle. The struggle of the Opposition against this slogan forced the "Fractionists" to drop it, but later they took up the slogan of democratic centralism, which they understood as meaning that the majority must submit to the minority. The theses of "Fractionists" appeared in the "Pali" (the theoretical monthly of the Greek Opposition).

At the moment this group is in course of disintegration; the honest elements are returning; the rest, consisting of corrupt elements, has formed a block with the Spartacus group, and both of them support the Stalinists in their dirty struggle against the Opposition; in fact, their slanders are more bitter and savage than those of the Stalinists. On the most important questions, such as the evaluation of Fascism, trade union unity, the immediate threat of war against the U. S. S. R., they take the same position as the Stalinists. They have all formed a Holy Alliance with the purpose of breaking down the oppositionist organization.

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